Americans support dental coverage in health care reforms

Over 60 per cent of Americans consider dental coverage part of an overall health care reform by the Obama legislation, a new public opinion survey has shown. The poll released at the launch of National Smile Month in June and commissioned by Oral Health America revealed that four in five adults agree that dental benefits are as important as general medical benefits in an overall health care benefit package.

Many poor and lower-middle class families in the US currently do not receive enough dental care, in part because dentists prefer patients who have private insurance or can pay in cash. The lack of dental care is also not restricted to the poor, recent data shows.

Experts on oral health say that about 100 million Americans have no access to adequate care.

In a recent letter to US president Barack Obama, the American Dental Association (ADA), which represents over 157,000 dentists in the US, recently urged the government to pay more attention to dental health care in the ongoing health-policy debate. “Acknowledging that the majority of Americans have access to excellent and relatively affordable dental care [...], we are compelled to point out that too many low-income Americans still suffer needlessly from dental disease,” the letter states. “More must be done to ensure that all Americans have access to quality oral-health services.”

The ADA recommends increasing funding to the nationwide Medicaid health programme, rebuilding the public dental-health infrastructure and supporting community-based prevention measures, such as fluoridation or school-based education programmes.

Obama’s health care reform initiative aims to extend health coverage to 45 million uninsured people in the US, as well as to preserve consumer choice and lower rising health care costs, by cutting more than US$200 billion in reimbursements to hospitals over the next decade. He has also announced his support of the introduction of a public health insurance plan, a concept similar to the failed health care plan developed by his current Secretary of State and former First Lady Hillary Clinton back in 1994.

The government’s health care reform proposals are opposed by the US Congress and other organisations like the American Medical Association, who say that the realisation would cost a total of US$1 trillion over the next decade and still leave millions of people in the US uninsured.
FDI pushes caries initiative with Rio conference

Daniel Zimmermann, DPT
HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany/FERNEY-VOLTAIRE, France: In order to address the global burden of dental caries, the FDI World Dental Federation has announced its first Global Caries Initiative Conference, which is to be held in July in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The event, organised in collaboration with the International Association for Dental Research and the Brazilian Dental Association, will mark the start of the organisation’s ten-year campaign to eliminate tooth decay by the year 2020, officials said.

According to the FDI, caries remains the most common dental disease worldwide. Although there has been a decline of dental decay in industrialised countries in recent years through fluoridated toothpaste and improved dental hygiene, in most low-income countries, up to 90 per cent of all people suffer from the condition, which often remains untreated.

The Rio conference is intended to address these inequalities amongst other topical issues. It will be for dental educators and scientists, as well as presidents of dental associations and government dental officers. Speakers from North America and Europe have been invited to address the need for changing the current paradigm of diagnosis, prevention and restoration of dental caries, and to present the implications of these for its future prevention and management.

The conference is currently open for registration. Fees are €80 for delegates from Latin America and €180 for those from other countries.

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Global network links dentists from India

Members of Dentalghar, which means the ‘home of dentistry’, will be able to contribute to a number of polls, surveys and articles, a spokes-woman for Smile-on told Dental Tribune.

Professionals looking to study abroad will also find information on work permits, visas and qualifications on the platform. She added that there will also be an opportunity to win bursaries and to contribute to volunteering in the UK and globally.

Prof. Bedi, who hopes that Dentalghar will become a ‘major force in the industry’, said: “The focus is on the subcontinent (Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and the diverse ‘Asian’ dental communities that have sprung up in regions as far apart as the US, Canada, the UK, South Africa, Singapore, Australia and the Middle East. We have more worldwide dentists of BIPS (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan) origin than our medical colleagues.” This factor, among others, gave rise to the momentum for starting Dentalghar, Bedi added.

“With an increasing number of dentists of Indian origin and a growing economy in India, Dentalghar will help us to work collectively,” Bedi said.

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann)